

## The Coolest Person I Know by lame0

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Asexual Reader, Asexuality, Awkward Crush, Drunken Confessions, F/M, Fluff, Friends to Lovers, Huddling For Warmth, Hurt/Comfort, Mutual Pining, New Year's Kiss, Past Steve Harrington/Nancy Wheeler, Protective Steve Harrington, Robin Buckley Has a Girlfriend, Sharing a Bed, Slow Burn, Steve Harrington is a Sweetheart, Swearing, kinda anxious reader, mostly gender neutral reader

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**Summary:**

You're invited on a trip to New York by Robin, Steve, and your lifetime best friend Catherine. The plan is to go to the Times Square New Years' celebration, but you hit some trouble on the drive there. Now, with the new couple doing their own thing, you're getting a lot of alone time with Steve, your longtime crush. Will you finally spill your feelings to him? Will he feel the same? And if he does, will he be okay with not having sex? (your asexuality isn't the entire plot, I promise)

# **1. I Think That Was the Tire...**

## **Author's Note:**

Asexual fun fact from your local pan ace!!

Although the label of asexuality didn't become popularized until the rise of the online platform AVEN (asexuality visibility and education network), being asexual has been talked about and recognized in queer spaces as a valid identity even before the internet (1960's through the 1980's).

•info found on an article on asexual history by slate.com•

## **Notes for the Chapter:**

Hi! This first chapter is pretty short and mostly preamble to set the scene. It was initially written for a female reader, but I tried my best to edit it and make it gender-neutral so please bear with me if there are any inconsistencies:) Also! This is my first time putting my writing out there, so I'd love some feedback! I have trouble with pacing so let me know if anything is hard to read. Enjoy <3

You shift uncomfortably in the passenger seat of Steve's car, trying to find a position to sleep in that doesn't make your neck sore after only a few seconds. Steve silently stares ahead at the snow-plowed road. You can hear the faint clicking of him absentmindedly flipping through stations, trying in vain to find something interesting to listen to.

After much wiggling, you finally give up on sleeping and contort yourself to look into the backseat. The sight you're met with is that of your best friend Catherine, who has her head firmly planted on Robin's shoulder. Both of them had dozed off next to the pile of suitcases in the seat beside them and it was a bit of a squeeze, but neither seem to mind. You smile at the sweet sight, insanely jealous of how comfortable they look.

“Couldn’t sleep?” Steve asked, glancing over at you and removing his hand from the radio.

You look over at him and see the bags starting to form under his eyes. You can’t imagine how tired he is. He’s been driving for at least 5 hours with only a few breaks to use the bathroom and get snacks. Not to mention it was getting pretty late.

“Yeah,” you say quietly, “Do you wanna see if there’s somewhere we can stop soon? You look kinda dead”

“Gee thanks,” he says resting his arm on the window sill, “I’ll be okay I think,”

“For 6 more hours?” you say skeptically.

Steve pauses for a moment. He sticks out his bottom lip before responding with a quick “yeah” and a shoulder shrug. You scoff playfully, eliciting a small smile from him. You feel your face warm at the sight.

“At least let me drive for a bit,” you say, leaning onto the center console.

“Hmm... maybe later”

“You said that like an hour ago”

“Well it isn’t later yet”

“Well then”

Remnants of snickers turn into comfortable silence as staticy jazz music plays from the only station that makes legible sound. You don’t know what you expected your senior year to be like, but sitting shotgun with Steve “the Hair” Harrington on a road trip certainly wasn’t even on the list of possibilities. You look at Steve and entertain the idea of this being some kind of wish-fulfilling dream, but pull away from the thought and fix your eyes on the road.

You hear the swish of Robin’s windbreaker and turn around to see that she now has her hand in Catherine’s. Seeing your two closest

friends together like this makes your heart feel lighter. You couldn't be happier that they finally made it official. For as long as you can remember, Cat's been head over heels for Robin. But she never did anything out of fear of messing up the friend group dynamic. You and the rest of your schoolyard crew encouraged her to go for it, but she had never managed to make a move.

Well, that *was* the case until the summer you two got jobs at the Gap (which just so happened to be right next to the ice cream shop that Robin had been hired at). Every day, Cat would make you go in on your breaks to Scoops Ahoy. You didn't mind at all, Robin was one of your close friends, and having Steve there as silly-costumed eye candy made it that much better. Although you never made it past awkward "hi's" and timidly placing your ice cream order with him, you began to really look forward to your daily Scoops Ahoy trips for the chance to talk to him.

That is until he and Robin just stopped showing up. Right after they had told you about some silly Russian code they were deciphering with Dustin Henderson, they just disappeared. You asked around, but no one knew where they could've been. It felt like you two were the only ones who cared and you were pretty worried, to say the least. You called their houses with no answer, and even went as far driving around town for any sign of them.

After the mall shut down and Steve and Robin reappeared, you confronted them to get some answers. It took some prying, but eventually, they told you the whole story with the code, the lab, and the "mind flayer". Spilled their guts is more like it. You ended up having to devote a day to get all the information.

Somehow, this trauma dump led to the four of you hanging out pretty often. Things started to move a bit quicker with Catherine and Robin too. It was probably because of Robin's near-death experience, but who knows. All *you* knew was that you and Steve were being pity invited on all of their "not dates". You would trail behind them like a puppy around downtown, all while nervously making conversation with the one and only: King Steve.

You figured Cat was doing this on purpose, although she would never outright say it. She could probably tell that you were dying for an

excuse to hang out with the boy whose initials you've been doodling on notebooks since you were 14. And you have to admit, these weird group hangout-date-things have been great in getting closer with him. Awkward "um's" and "nice weather huh?'s" slowly turned into pleasant conversations and playful banter.

You didn't realize just how close the group had gotten until Cat called to ask you about a trip to New York and you accepted with no hesitation. Had it been just a few months earlier, you probably would have come up with some excuse to stay home and miss out on what will probably be the coolest new year's eve ever. All because of your silly little crush on Steve. Luckily you've been able to contain your shyness around him pretty well, so you felt confident about your ability to stay cool and collected on this trip.

"They look pretty comfortable," Steve observes, pulling you from your thoughts.

"Yeah, and I thought *I* snagged the best seat in the car," you say with a smile, plopping back into a forward-facing position.

"What, you don't like sitting up here with me?" he says teasingly.

"I never said that," you laugh, "but it would be nice to have someone to lean on like that. I'd probably have an easier time getting some sleep too"

"You're into stuff like that? I thought you were asexual?" Steve asks, genuinely curious.

Living in the Midwest, Robin was his first real introduction to anything outside of heterosexuality, and meeting you and Cat showed just how much he didn't know. You could tell he was actively trying to learn, but it was taking some time.

"Yeah, but stuff like that and sex are super different. I think I'd like that kind of thing with the right person," you say.

"Gotcha," Steve says, before going to fiddle with the radio again.

The silence that ensues is a bit less comfortable than before, but not necessarily in a bad way. He just seems deep in thought.

"When did they end up telling you that they went steady?" you ask.

Steve whips his head towards you with a funny look on his face. You look back at him, equally puzzled.

"*Went steady?*" he laughs, "What is this, the 1950s? You sound like my dad telling me the story of how he got his first girlfriend."

"Well what do you call it then?" you ask defensively as your face starts to warm.

"Getting together? Making it official?"

"Those are so wordy"

"And 'going steady' *isn't?*"

"Well, *I* think it's cute. It sounds vintage"

"I guess, but-"

"Can you just answer the question please?" you finally assert, big smiles plastered over both your faces.

"Robin told me she was gonna ask a few weeks ago," Steve finally said after a few last chuckles, "but she didn't tell me how it went until we ended up on the same shift a few days ago. How about you?"

"Cat called to tell me as soon as she got home," you say, smiling at the memory of her excited squeal as you picked up the receiver.

Steve glances at them in the rearview again and then back at you.

"I feel like a road trip is kinda a big step," Steve says, "for a new couple at least"

"Mmm yeah I guess, but it's with a group. Would probably be different if it was just them"

"Yeah, probably," Steve says, "I still bet they only asked me to come so I could drive though"

“Well if that’s the case I only got invited because they felt bad about leaving me out” you laugh.

“Oh shut up, you coming along was always a part of the plan,” says a newly awake Catherine, playfully smacking your shoulder.

“Not you though dingus, you were right about us just needing a ride,” Robin says with a yawn.

“Haha,” Steve deadpans as you stifle a giggle.

“How far out are we?” Catherine asks, head still firmly in its place on Robin's shoulder.

“About 6 hours away,” you say motioning to the hastily folded map on the dash.

“Ooo... we should probably stop for the night. Pick back up in the morning,” Robin says looking at her watch.

“Tell that to Mr ‘maybe later’ over here,” you say, nodding your head towards Steve.

“Will you all chill out, I'm fine. We left late this morning, we shouldn't stop,” Steve says.

“Ugh stop being such a dad,” Robin says, “We scheduled in an extra day, Harrington. We can afford to get a room somewhere so you don't crash and get us killed”

“Yeah driving while tired is basically like driving drunk,” Catherine adds shutting her eyes again sleepily.

You motion your agreement and look over at Steve.

“Well, it's my car and I'm the one driving. I think I can make it there without stopp-” before Steve can fully complete his thought there's a large bump in the road and an audible HISS.

“Shit,” Steve says shutting his eyes and pushing his head back on the headrest, “I think that was the tire...”

“Ya think?” Robin says patting Steve’s shoulder, “What was that you were saying about not stopping, dingus?”

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

I'm currently editing the second chapter, so I'll try to get it out as soon as possible! This next one is a lot more interesting in my opinion (and a lot longer) and I can't wait to share:) Thank you all!

...

my tumblr: [lame0-is-trying](#)



## 2. No Double Beds, Boy

### Notes for the Chapter:

This chapter actually has some meat to it, but this fic is a bit of a slow burn so nothing too juicy yet haha:) There are some mentions of bullying in this chapter, as well as an encounter where nudity is implied. None of it is too bad, just thought I would mention. Hope you enjoy!

Steve pulls off into the shoulder and gets out of the car. He circles the car once before squatting next to the back right tire. You, Robin, and Cat all sit in silence awaiting the verdict. Steve opens the car door and slumps into the driver's seat.

"Is it flat?" you ask.

Steve sighs as he rubs his mouth. "It's getting there, I must've run over some ice"

"Should I go find a call box?" Robin suggests.

"No we should be able to make it off the highway," Steve says, shutting the door, "Let's find somewhere to stop I guess"

Steve creeps off the interstate and you find yourselves in a small town. They seem to be taking advantage of being right off the highway because there are quite a few motels and inns littering the sidewalks. However, most of them appear to be full. "No vacancy" signs flicker as far as the eye can see, so it's slim pickings.

Catherine eventually spots one that doesn't look too run down and points it out. It even has a small diner next door, which seems pretty nice. It's the first one you've seen so far that has any room. Steve pulls into the parking lot and all four of you bundle up and file out.

"How many rooms are we getting?" you ask.

"Two doubles?" Robin suggests shutting the car door.

"I can get one of them!" Cat calls out

"Same here," Steve says, locking the car.

Robin opens the door of the motel lobby and you're greeted with the cheerful ring of a bell. Inside at the front desk is an older man, smoking a cigarette (the smell of which permeated throughout the little lobby, urging you to exclusively breathe through your mouth). You and Robin let Catherine and Steve lead the way to the desk.

"Hi," Steve starts. The man doesn't look up from the newspaper in his hands. "We'd like- two doubles you said? Yeah, two double bed-"

"No double beds, boy. All booked," the man says tapping his cigarette to the ashtray, "Just singles. Beds are queens though"

"Um... alright," Steve says.

He and Catherine turn to face you and Robin to discuss your next move.

"I don't think either of us can pay for more than one room," Catherine says glancing to Steve who shakes his head, "So.. what do we do?"

"I mean, I can get another one if we really need it," you suggest.

"Two should be fine, it can just be me and..." Robin pauses for a second, glancing at Catherine, then Steve, then you. Suddenly, Steve and Catherine follow suit, all of their eyes now boring into you. A sudden wave of embarrassment washes over you as you realize what they were trying to decide on. You glance at Steve who raises his eyebrows at you before glancing at Cat, then back at you. Eventually, everyone's attention is back on Robin.

"Me and Steve in one room? Then you two in the other?" Robin finally finishes her sentence.

"Sounds good to me," you practically blurt out. Steve nods.

"Yeah, that makes the most sense," Catherine says with a weak smile.

You can tell she's a bit disappointed about not getting to share a room with Robin, but you're grateful that Robin made the decision she did. As much as you like Steve, the idea of sharing a bed is just a little too intimidating.

"Just the two singles then," Catherine says sweetly, turning back to the man at the desk.

"Alright then," the man says.

Luckily, you're able to snag rooms right near each other and begin to head back to the car. You open the lobby door for Steve and Cat as they make their way back into the parking lot.

"Oh! You wouldn't happen to know of any mechanics or anything around here would you?" Robin asks the man, pausing right as she meets you at the door.

"You're in luck, Gary's shop should still be open and he's just a few doors down," the man says with the same bored tone as before, "He'll take it tonight but you more'n likely won't get it back 'till tomorrow"

"Great, thanks," she says, taking a step into the cold winter air.

"If yall end up going, tell 'em Chuck is counting on getting his cassettes back. He'll know what it means," the man calls out monotonously.

"Uh... Will do..." Robin says, before giving you a shrug. You follow her to the car, the bell ringing as the door shuts behind you.

Steve pops the trunk and so you both can grab your suitcases and duffles. Once Robin and Cat grab their stuff from the backseat you begin to make your way to your rooms.

"Where'd he say the shop was?" Steve asks, leading the way up the stairs.

"Not far that way," you say, pointing east, "He wasn't too specific though"

"Alright, I'll put this stuff down and head over," he says fumbling

with the room key.

“Need anybody to go with?” Catherine asks, slyly nudging your arm. You give her a death glare that she ignores.

“Nah I should be fine,” Steve says, placing his bag down next to room 226.

“Don’t forget to tell him about Chuck’s cassettes,” Robin says.

“Yeah I’ll be sure to get right on that,” Steve responds sarcastically.

You finally make it into your room. You set your stuff down next to the bed and sit down onto the dark maroon comforter. Catherine shuts the door and lays her things down by the TV. She immediately goes to turn on the heater near the window, jumping as it roars to life.

“I’m sorry you don’t get to stay with Robin,” you say.

“No, don’t even worry about it. I know it would be weird for you and Steve to share a single room...” she says sincerely, as she walks around the bed and plops down on the other side.

You sigh. You can’t help but feel a bit bad, you and Steve are really the only things keeping them apart when Cat clearly wants to be with her girlfriend.

“... Right?” Cat follows up.

“Huh? Oh no- yeah, you’re completely right,” you say.

Catherine cocks an eyebrow at you.

“Wow. That was so convincing,” she teases.

“No I mean it,” you laugh, “sharing a bed with Steve is a little too suggestive for me. Plus we barely qualify as close friends right now, it would be super awkward”

“Yeah, with his reputation he might get the wrong idea too”

“No, Steve knows I’m not into that. I know he’d be respectful, it’s just... I don’t know...”

“No I get it, and so does Robin. I think she made the right call”

“Yeah”

You join her in laying back on the bed with a sigh. The bed isn’t the worst thing you’ve ever felt, but it certainly isn’t great. You shift, trying to get your upper back off of a slightly pokey spring.

“You see the little diner next door?” Cat asks.

“Yeah that looks super cute, I was thinking we could go there tomorrow before we head out. Robin and I can probably get the bill since you and Steve got the rooms”

“Ooo yeah! And in that case, I’ll be sure to order all I can eat”

“Oh goody,” you laugh, “You remember that diner near your grandpa’s house? And you got the omelet, but then-“

“UGH, NO! Gross, don’t remind me! I was in the bathroom for days,” she grimaces.

Your eyes settle on the partially open bathroom door as your laughter dies down. A warm shower sounds like it would hit the spot after 6 hours in the car.

“Speaking of the bathroom, I think I’m gonna take a shower before I knock out,” you say sitting up.

“Alright let me know how the bathroom is”

You sit on the edge of the bed to grab your shower stuff, along with a change of clothes, before heading to the worn wooden door at the back of the room. The bathroom takes up the entire width of the motel room, but it’s squished lengthways. Just enough room for the shower tub combination to fit against the left wall. Straight ahead is the toilet with a single sink and counter space to the right.

“It’s not bad, just a little small- well, skinny,” you say taking in the

strange room.

“Okay good,” Catherine calls back. There’s a moment of silence before she calls out again, “Hey, you alright if I go hang with Robin while you’re in there?”

“Oh yeah, go for it,” you say beginning to close the door, “See you when you get back”

“Alrighty”

You hear her leave and lock the door as you start getting undressed. You take a second to figure out the heat settings and wait a bit for it to warm up. You carefully step over the tub wall and ease yourself into the stream of hot water, goosebumps prickling over your skin from the contrast of cold air and steam as you let out a relaxed sigh. You take your time, in no rush to get out, and start rolling out the crick in your neck from the car ride.

After a while, you eventually hear Catherine unlocking the door. You’re finishing up anyway, so you decide to get her opinion on what time to wake up. Hopefully, she’s already talked to Robin about it. You step out of the shower and wrap a towel around yourself before turning the doorknob.

“Wait-!” came a voice, but you didn’t register it.

“Hey Cat, what time do you think we should- GAH-“

That is certainly not Catherine. It’s Steve, standing there like a deer in headlights, duffel bag in hand. He looks away as quickly as possible as you slam the bathroom door shut again.

“Sorry! Sorry... I- uh...” Steve calls out.

You quickly start to put on the pajamas you had set out on the sink, disregarding your still-wet skin and hair.

“N-no! You’re fine!...” you call back, a waver in your voice.

“I swear I didn’t see anything!” he reassures you.

You open the door, which smacks loudly into the wall of the tub. Steve is still turned away as you re-emerge from the bathroom

“I tried knocking before I came in, but Cat left the key out so I- but I didn’t realize you-“ Steve stumbles over his words.

“You’re fine, you’re fine!” you say before clearing your throat, “Did you um- did you need something-? You can turn around now”

“Yeah, uh... can I stay in here? When I got back Robin and Cat were asleep and they snore so god damn loud- I can sleep on the floor too um... ‘cause- y’know” he said, looking at you with a blushing face as he runs a hand through his hair.

You felt your stomach flip. This is exactly the situation you were so nervous about. What if you run out of things to talk about? What if he snores just as loud as Robin and Cat? Ew, how awkward is it gonna be if he has to wake you up tomorrow and you have morning breath? But you couldn’t just send him back to the other room, then you’d be all alone in a motel room. And *especially* because you know exactly how loud Robin and Catherine snore- they sound like a pair of lawnmowers and he was the one who really needed the sleep.

“Uhhh yeah, but the floor is kinda grubby...” you say, staring at the frayed carpet.

“I got some extra sheets from the front desk after I grabbed my stuff,” he says, one hand awkwardly finding its place on his hip and the other pointing to the pile of linens on top of his duffle bag, “I’m all set”

“Okay, yeah for sure. All- all good,” you manage to get out.

You both open your mouth to say something else, but turn away from each other instead. You decide to busy yourself with fishing your toothbrush out of your bag as Steve starts to get his spot ready on the floor. He lays out a sheet in the space between the bed and the door. Both of you fervently avoid eye contact.

You shuffle back into the bathroom and get your wet hair situated for the night. Wetting your toothbrush, you let out a sigh and decide to

try and break the silence.

“So how was the-“ you start.

“Huh?” Steve calls from outside the bathroom.

You cringe at the thought of now having to repeat yourself. You take a deep breath before turning around.

“How did the mechanic go?” you say louder, leaning against the door frame.

“Oh, that- yeah it was fine. Desk guy was right about not getting it ‘till tomorrow, but I’m just glad I could get it in before it starts snowing”

“It’s supposed to snow more tonight?” you say taking the toothbrush out of your mouth.

“Yeah, at least that’s what Gary said”

“And Gary is...?”

“The mechanic”

“Right”

More silence.

“You tell him about Chuck's cassettes?”

“Oh yeah,” Steve laughs as he starts rifling through his stuff, “The whole time he was talking to me about how he met Chuck through their mutual friends. Who own that diner next door, actually. They all seem pretty close”

“Well that’s nice, it seems like a super small town. Probably not many people to talk to.”

“Yeah, but I guess we don’t have much room to talk coming from Hawkins“

You go to respond, but your brain shuts off as you realize that Steve



is making his way towards the bathroom, toothbrush and change of clothes in hand.

“Sorry, just gonna brush my teeth too,” Steve says sliding past you.

You may be imagining things, but it feels like he pauses as his arm brushes yours. Your eyes meet just long enough for a chill to run down your spine. You would love to look into his big, dumb, beautiful eyes for the rest of your life- even longer if you could. Something about them erases every thought from your head and all you can do is stare.

You break from your mini trance just in time to give him some more room to walk through.

“Sorry, I’m totally in the way,” you say, looking down at the ground.

“No, no you’re fine,” Steve says.

When you don’t hear Steve turn on the sink, you look up to see him still staring at you.

“What’s up?” you say taking the toothbrush out of your mouth once again.

“Nothing, sorry,” he says shaking his head slightly, “Just... forgot what I was doing for a second”

“What, did my beauty distract you?”

You freeze at your own words. Where did that come from? When did you get so bold? Steve just chuckles in response.

“Maybe,” he says calmly, completely oblivious to the whirlwind going on in your brain, “I’m also kinda an idiot”

“Mmh yeah that’s probably it,” you tease him with a small smirk. You get a short laugh in response.

You move over to the sink to spit as Steve steps aside. He goes to lean against the wall and brings his toothbrush to his mouth. You look in the mirror and see a strand of spit stuck to your lip. You quickly

scoop water into your mouth to rinse before Steve can notice. You're suddenly super self-conscious of- well, *everything* now that you're so close to him. The thought of him seeing you do something even *slightly* embarrassing makes a pit form in your stomach.

"Ya know," Steve says, pulling you from your thoughts and making you jump, "I think they might've done this on purpose"

You're now practically choking on the water in your mouth, and quickly spit it out. Does he know about Cat's constant matchmaking attempts?

"Why do you say that?" you ask, trying your best to hide the anxiety in your voice.

"Well they always want to be with each other, but they tiptoe around it because they don't want to leave us out. Maybe they pretended to fall asleep to get some alone time and then they're gonna act like it was an accident tomorrow. Well, I guess they were snoring though..."

"I guess I could see that," you say, relaxing a bit at his answer, "It's always fun hanging out with them, but I wish they didn't feel bad about going out by themselves. That's just what people do when they like each other."

"Yeah and we're friends too," Steve says gesturing between the two of you, "It's not like we can't just hang out ourselves... y'know if they're busy"

You bring your hand up to your mouth, trying to hide the grin threatening to make its way across your face.

"What?" Steve says, smiling back at you.

"Nothing," you say, a bit embarrassed that he noticed your attempt to hide your excitement, "It's just really weird thinking about you hanging out with me on purpose"

"Shut up, don't say that," Steve says sincerely, "Honestly, I wish I started hanging out with you sooner. Maybe I wouldn't have ended up such a loser after high school"

"Cmon, you're not a loser, Steve."

There's a moment of silence. Neither of you knows what to say next. You're now incredibly interested in the hem of your shirt, and Steve is trying to line up his toothbrush with the line of grout on the counter.

"I've been meaning to ask... Did I... I mean, in school, was I ever- ya know," Steve finally stutters out.

"A douchebag to me?"

"...Yeah"

"I mean... not directly"

Steve's face fell a bit, "Oh god. What did I do?"

"Well... it was my freshman year, Tommy H. had asked me to meet him under the bleachers at the homecoming game," you say, as Steve winced, "Heh, yeah... I obviously told him I wasn't interested and he got all pissy. Started telling everyone I was boring and that I was a tease- I'd never even talked to him before that night. I remember you would laugh along when he'd call me a prude or something in the halls, but that was pretty much it. Never anything too personal"

"God..." Steve said, running a hand through his hair, "Now that you say it I think I remember that... I'm really sorry..."

"It was 3 years ago," you say with a shrug.

You really do mean it, but you can still feel the sting of seeing Steve laugh at your torment all those years ago.

"I was an idiot back then"

"I'm not gonna argue with you too hard on that one"

"Heh, yeah... Tommy is the biggest asshole I've ever met. He doesn't think about anyone but himself. Took me way too long to realize"

"Hawkins is a small place, it's easy to get caught up in popularity and

stuff,” you say, shrugging once again, “I’m just excited to see him end up a washed-up lameo or something. Mumbling about how he misses his high school days while everyone else has moved on”

You both chuckle a bit, before falling into that familiar silence. A little weight has lifted off both of your chests, so it's a much more comfortable silence this time around. The kind where time feels like it moves differently. You realize that you're still making prolonged eye contact with him and you could've sworn that you just saw him look at your lips. Just for a second. You start to feel clammy and nervous so you break eye contact and turn towards the door.

“I’ll uh... let you get changed now,” you say, motioning towards the t-shirt and pajama pants in the bend of his arm, “I’m gonna go see if there’s anything on TV”

“Oh- yeah, thanks,” Steve says.

You walk out as Steve slowly closes the door behind you. You go over to the TV, turn it on, and begin flipping through channels. You settle on Late Night with David Letterman and make your way over to the bed. You sit down, lean against the headboard, and pull the covers up over your lap. You aren’t paying attention to David’s latest “Top Ten List” though, you’re still reeling over how nice that conversation with Steve was. You made your peace with the idea of never getting an apology from him, you just figured that he didn't remember, but you feel lighter now that it's been cleared up. And the fact that he genuinely likes hanging out with you? Wow. Who would've thought you'd end up here.

You hear the bathroom doorknob turn, and look over to see Steve in his pj's. You realize that you don’t typically see him in anything but a jacket or long sleeve these days. You’d forgotten that he looks really good in a t-shirt. You could honestly stare at him and his stupidly cool hair and stupidly pretty arms all day. You bring your attention back to the TV before Steve can realize that you're staring.

“I think I’m gonna knock out,” Steve says putting his clothes away. He then walks toward the front door and looks at you for confirmation before flipping off the light switch, “You can keep the TV on though, I don’t mind”

"No, I think I'll go to bed too. This is kinda boring anyway," you say, going to stand up.

"I got it," Steve says, walking over to the TV and shutting it off.

"Thanks," you say sweetly.

"No problem"

He sits on the sheets he had spread out on the floor earlier and, once he seems settled in, you turn off the bedside lamp.

"Goodnight Steve"

"Goodnight"

With that, you sigh and shuffle down into the covers to find a comfortable position. You instantly feel like you're starting to drift off, the lack of a nap during the drive finally catching up to you.

Just then, the phone rings- a sharp trill that feels like it's splitting your skull. You jump up into a sitting position and quickly pick up the receiver.

"Hello?" you say as calmly as you can manage.

*"Somethin' wrong with the gas. No heat for a while. Probably all night"*

"Oh gosh, what happ- hello?"

The line hums as you realize you just got hung up on. You groan.

"What's up?" Steve says rolling over and propping himself up on his elbow.

"He said something about the gas not working, which means no heat for the night"

"Oh shit"

"Yeah..."

"I didn't even hear the heater shut off"

“Me neither”

“We should be fine, right? We’ll be asleep anyway”

“I really hope so”

“I guess we’ll find out”

Steve lays back down and you do the same. You close your eyes once again, letting the stress of the phone call float away into irrelevance. All you can think about right now is how heavy your eyelids are, and so you decide to focus on that and begin to float away into a somewhat decent sleep.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Oooo a snowy night with no heat, i wonder what happens next hehe >:) The next chapter is where the juicy stuff actually starts! I'm a sucker for a slow burn, so I apologize to everyone desperate for some Steve fluff, but I promise it's coming haha. I'll get it up asap, thank you for the patience. Like I said before, I'm a pretty new writer so let me know how the pacing and run-on sentences are :) Thanks, y'all!  
<3

...

my tumblr: lame0-is-trying

### 3. Always a Maybe With You

#### Notes for the Chapter:

Hi all! Thanks for the kudos on this piece, I really appreciate it :) As always, constructive criticism is welcome and encouraged. Enjoy!!

You wake up to the most intense shivering of your life, your teeth are chattering, whole body shaking- the whole nine yards. You roll over to look at the bedside clock, which reads 1:36 am. Groaning, you pull the covers up over your face and shakily reach up to touch your cheeks, hoping to bring some feeling back to them. You strain your eyes shut and try to ignore the cold long enough to fall asleep again, but it's no use. Your shivering continues to pull you back into consciousness no matter how hard you try. You can hear the wind whipping outside and pull the covers down just enough to watch the snow falling through a crack in the curtains. You glance to see if there is any sign of life on the heater, but no. Still out.

You hear Steve shuffle around on the ground, and scramble into a sitting position at the sound of it- you can't believe you forgot he was here. You can't tell if he's asleep, but he's definitely as cold as you are, probably more. The thin sheets are practically strangling him with how much he's tried to bundle himself up. He's shivering, much like you are, and you decide to do something about it. Bunching the covers up to your chin, you shuffle to the edge of the bed and start trying to get his attention.

"Steve..." you say, with no response, "Steve!"

He jerks awake and looks over his shoulder to look at you.

"You okay?" he asks, his voice groggy and full of worry.

"Yeah, I'm okay," you say reassuringly, "Come up here"

You motion him towards the bed and he nods. He pushes himself up and makes his way over to you, taking the sheet with him. You scoot over and pull the covers back for him to climb in, wincing at the cold

air that flies into your face. Steve eagerly steps in, dropping the sheet onto the floor, and pulls the covers up to his chin.

“Thanks,” he whispers shakily.

“Of course”

You screw your eyes shut, trying once again to fall back asleep (but also to avoid the awkwardness of facing Steve). You spend about a minute or so in silence waiting for your exhaustion to take over, but to no avail. You won’t get a wink of sleep until you warm up some more, so you work up the confidence to open your eyes and look at Steve.

“Steve?”

“Yeah?” he asks, reopening his eyes as well.

“I’m insanely cold”

“Uh yeah, me too”

“Can I...?”

As if he read your mind, he begins inching closer to you and you follow suit. There’s no room for the awkwardness and nerves that would fill your brain had this been any other scenario. You collide with each other and get as close as possible. Steve wraps his arms around you as you lean into his chest, pulling your hands up in front of yourself so that they’re encased between the two of you. You’re both still shivering violently, but you feel significantly warmer. Perhaps your blushing is helping to speed up the process. After a moment of shuffling into a comfortable spot, you notice Steve shakily balling up the fabric of the sheets in his left hand.

“Is your hand okay?” you ask him.

“Eh... I can’t really feel it. It was out of the blankets while I was sleeping”

“Here,” you say, wiggling your hand free and grabbing his. You put his hand on your ribs and place your upper arm on top of it. You can



feel the cold from his hand even through the long sleeve of your shirt, and you wonder how long his hands must have been sitting out of the sheets. Steve lets out a shaky exhale before he hesitantly relaxes his hand against you.

“Is that any better?” you ask concernedly.

“Y-yeah, it’s a lot better. Thanks”

“No problem,” you say with a shaky sigh, “... I’m sorry I didn’t let you come up before it got this cold”

“We didn’t know it was *gonna* get this cold,” Steve reassures you, his voice thick with sleep.

“Yeah, but I shouldn’t have made it awkward, I should’ve just let you sleep up here in the first place,” you ramble.

“Nothing was awkward, I’m the one who decided to sleep on the floor”

“Well, I’m still sorry”

“Stop apologizing, there’s nothing to be sorry about. It’s all good...”

After a few minutes, you feel Steve’s breathing slow as he falls asleep. You sit in silence, still waiting for your shivering to ease up a bit.

You eventually start drifting off when Steve pulls you impossibly closer. Your breath hitches for a moment as you begin to process what is happening. Steve then nuzzles into the top of your head and lets out a content sigh. You feel your face warm and let out the quietest giggle you can manage. You take a deep breath and let yourself melt into him on your exhale. With another inhale, you take the opportunity to appreciate just how good he smells and how soft his t-shirt is against your cheek. You can’t help but smile against him and revel in how secure it feels to have his hands pressing you further towards his body.

Then suddenly, Steve shifts his shoulder to cradle the back of your neck in his hand, causing your face to warm up intensely. In order to keep your hand awake due to the sudden change in position, you pull

your arm out from between the two of you and wrap it around his waist. You'd be lying if you said that you weren't enjoying his sudden intimacy, Steve is a great cuddler it seems.

He then places a long, lazy kiss on top of your head. You completely tense up.

"Steve?" you ask barely above a whisper, "Are you awake?"

You don't get a response, he just continues his deep breathing. You feel your stomach do a flip as you fully process what just happened. Even if he wasn't conscious while he did it, the thought of getting a kiss from Steve is absolutely wild. It feels like your scalp is tingling on the spot where his lips once were, and you resist the urge to reach up and touch your head out of fear of waking him up. You don't know whether to be excited or to just forget it and go to sleep. He probably didn't even realize what he was doing. Maybe his subconscious thought he was with Nancy Wheeler or something. Your heart sinks at the thought of that and you let out a sigh.

If it weren't for the cold, this would probably be the most comfortable you've ever been. You pretend for a moment that this isn't what it is. That Steve is laying with you like this because he hates to be apart from you, and not because he's worried about freezing to death. Your breathing begins to match up with his as you doze off to your fantasy. You wish you could stay here forever.

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Around 10 am, you come around to find your face pressed into Steve's back. You must have become the big spoon at some point last night and your heart warms at the way Steve is curled up against you. It's still super cold in the room, and Steve is still fast asleep. You scoot yourself closer, trying to keep as much warmth as possible between the two of you. You rest your eyes for a bit longer, enjoying every last second of laying like this with him.

He eventually stirs and gently grabs the arm you have around his waist. You reopen your eyes and feel a blush creeping across your face at his touch.

"Hey, you awake?" he asks, patting your arm.

"Yeah," you say groggily.

"God, it's still so cold"

"Yeah, I don't think the heater ever turned back on"

"Is the gas- or whatever it was- working yet?"

"I'm not sure, it should be"

"Okay, I'll go turn it on in a sec," he says through a yawn.

"No, I got it," you laugh gently, stifling your own yawn before getting up.

"Mkay," Steve hums, rolling onto his stomach.

You walk around the bed and scurry towards the window, goosebumps creeping up your neck. You jump as the heater roars to life and open the curtains, before running back into the warm bed to wait for the room to become a bit more habitable. It looks like Steve is drifting off again and you can't help but admire how pretty he is when he's this relaxed. He hasn't had the chance to do that much the past few years.

You appreciate the way his hair is strewn about on the pillow and falling onto his face. You reach out and pull a strand of it out of the corner of his mouth.

"Thanks," Steve sighs, eyes closed and cheek pressed into the pillow, "You guys were right, it's a good thing we stopped when we did. I needed to sleep so bad"

"How *did* you sleep?" you ask softly, turning to look up at the ceiling.

"Like a baby after I moved up here. This is the most comfortable goddamn bed I've ever slept in"

You laugh quietly, feeling the spring poking your thigh and the cheap sheets against your feet. Despite the low quality of the bed, you couldn't agree with him more.

"I'm glad," you laugh, eyes still fixed on the ceiling, "Cat and I were talking about going to that diner next door before we head out. You up for it?"

"Yeah, sounds good. They've got rave reviews from Gary," Steve says.

"Oh, well we have to try it then," you joke.

Steve laughs lightly into the pillow before pushing himself off of the bed.

"I gotta piss," he says, walking around the bed towards the bathroom.

"... thanks for letting me know?"

"You're welcome"

And with that, the bathroom door shuts. You sit up in the bed, debating whether or not to grab your stuff to get ready for the day. Right as you decide to lay down for a bit longer, there's a knock at the door. You already know who it is.

You stand from the bed and make your way over to the door and slide the chain lock off.

"Hey lovebirds," you say, greeted by a very apologetic-looking Cat and Robin, both of whom are still in their clothes from yesterday.

"Hey..." they say in unison.

"Come on in," you say, stepping aside.

Cat and Robin's eyes immediately travel to the bed that clearly used to have two people sleeping in it. They immediately snap their eyes back to you.

"Don't even start, you know it wasn't like that," you whisper as threateningly as you can, "You felt how cold it got last night, we thought we were gonna get hypothermia or something"

"Trust me, we're not judging," Catherine says earnestly.

"Yeah, and speaking of the cold, Chuck gave us coupons for the diner instead of a refund," Robin scoffs, awkwardly holding up four slips of paper.

You hear a flush and the rush of sink water, and you all look towards the bathroom.

"Please tell me it wasn't too awkward," Cat says quickly.

"It was fine, he was cool about everything," you manage to say just before Steve walks out.

Cat and Robin greet him as he makes his way over to the group, stopping right next to you.

"Hey, you guys come to kick me out of this bed too?" Steve says facetiously.

"Very funny," Cat says, "We came to apologize for screwing up the sleeping arrangements,"

"And we come bearing gifts," Robin says, pushing the diner coupons into his chest, "We really are sorry"

Steve takes the pieces of paper and begins to look them over. Robin looks past him and notices the pitiful makeshift bed on the floor, "Wait, I thought you both slept on the bed?"

"He was sleeping on the floor until I got too cold and made him come up," you explain.

"Yeah, you basically saved my fingers from falling off," Steve says, "I've never heard of the heat going out at a motel"

"Hence the coupons," Robin says.

"I honestly didn't realize how cold it was until I got up this morning," Cat says nonchalantly.

"We get it, you guys didn't wait till 1 am to start huddling for warmth," you tease.

"Heh, sorry," Cat says.

"Well, we'll let you guys get ready, what time do you wanna head out?" Robin asks, inching towards the door.

"Brunch at the diner at 11:00? Then we can get the car, and get back on the road around noon?" you suggest, looking at Steve.

"I'm good with that," Steve agrees.

"Alright, we'll be ready by then," Cat says grabbing the suitcase she left behind last night.

"Alrighty," you say as they close the door behind them. You sigh and sit back down on the bed.

"Four free meals isn't a bad deal," Steve says reading the coupons again.

"Yeah," you say as Steve places them in your outstretched hand, "I guess Robin and I will have to pay for your guy's meal next time"

"Why would you guys pay for our meals?"

"Because you and Cat got us the rooms"

"You guys don't have to worry about me"

"Why not?"

"Because I would feel bad"

"Well I feel bad about you paying for the room," you say sincerely, "And you still have to get your car- Ooo just let me help pay for that!"

"Nope"

"Why not?"

"It's my car"

"Steve"

"y/n"

"I'm helping you pay for it," you say resolutely.

Steve sighs. "Maybe."

"Always a maybe with you," you laugh.

You both take turns using the bathroom to get dressed and ready for the day. Once Steve is ready, you slip on your boots and make sure to grab the coupons. Steve holds the door open for you as you're leaving the room, so you give him a shy "thanks" as you slink by. Robin and Cat meet you guys near the stairs at 10:58 and you all start the trek through the fresh snow to the restaurant.

You all walk into the little diner and are met with a frenzy of people inside. That's when it finally hits you that you weren't the only people who didn't have heat last night. There were so many families of four buzzing at their tables it almost made you dizzy. You see two very stressed looking waitstaff flitting around, struggling to keep up with the crowd.

"Well, I guess we know who snagged all the double rooms," Robin remarks.

"I'll be right over, y'all," an older woman, dressed differently from the other staff, calls from across the dining area.

You all nod politely at her as she goes back to bussing the table she's at. You all peel off your snow jackets and take a seat on the bench next to the door, waiting patiently as a toddler runs past while his dad chases after him. The woman eventually makes her way over to the host stand and begins to grab menus for you all.

"Just you four?" she asks, clearly tired and frazzled.

You all utter some variation of "yup" or "uh-huh" and she signals for you to follow her. Making your way through the sea of crying children and bickering couples, she shows you to a booth towards the back and near the kitchen.

"Pretty busy today," Cat observes politely, "Is everyone here for the

coupons?"

"Yeah, Chuck is really testing my patience with those damn things. The old coot..." the woman grumbles.

Robin and Cat slide into one side of the booth, leaving the other for you and Steve. You sit down first and scoot towards the window. Once you're far enough down the bench, Steve sits down as well, his jean-clad leg brushing up against yours making your heart skip a beat.

"So, what can I get you folks to drink?" the woman (whose name tag reads "Sylvie") asks, whipping out a pad of paper.

"I'll have an orange juice, please," Robin says.

"Can I get a coffee?" Cat asks.

"Yup," Sylvie responds, pen scribbling away.

"Just water for me," Steve says.

"Same here," you add.

"Alright, I'll get those out for you," Sylvie says, immediately turning on her heels to face the kitchen.

You all thank her as she walks away.

"That was Sylvia," Steve says, looking at the group.

"Wow, thanks dingus, we never would've guessed that," Robin says, placing her elbows up on the table.

"No- I mean she's one of the owners," Steve sighs, "She's friends with the front desk guy and the mechanic"

"How do you know that?" Robin asks, furrowing her eyebrows.

"There's a lot of time to talk when you're the only person at a car shop right before close," Steve responds, "He basically told me the entire history of their friendship"



"Well, it's nice to hear that you know the ins and outs of a place we'll never see again," Robin says, leaning affectionately on Cat.

Steve pretends to laugh as Robin gives him a shit-eating grin.

You hear the kitchen doors open and see Sylvie making her way back to your table, drinks in hand. She takes notice of Robin and Catherine, who sit back up as she's placing your drinks down.

"So, how long have you two been together?" she asks suddenly.

You can see the surprise on Cat and Robin's faces as they look back up at her.

"Uh... we made it official a couple of weeks ago," Cat says, absolutely bewildered, "How'd you know?"

"I know a couple when I see one. I've got real good at spottin' the new ones over the years- no matter how subtle they try to be," Sylvie says with a wink, pouring Catherine's coffee and passing it to her, "Y'all ready to order?"

Robin and Cat get a french toast combo to share, Steve gets a grilled cheese, and you decide on the short stack pancake meal. Sylvie gets everything written down and heads back to the kitchen. You notice that the rest of the dining area is beginning to quiet down as groups start finishing up and leaving. You've been waiting for your food a good while when a large, bearded man in a dirty t-shirt walks through the front doors.

"Gary!" a man's voice calls from the kitchen.

"Heya Freddy!" the man calls back joyfully before scanning the room. His eyes settle on Steve and he makes his way over to your table. You look over at Steve, who seems to be a bit startled by the sudden approach.

"Hey there!" Gary says, giving a small wave to all four of you, "Chuck said I might find you here, just wanted to let you know that your car is ready to go"

"Oh awesome," Steve says, craning his neck to look Gary in the eye,

"I'll come by after we're finished up here"

"No problem, take your time. Freddy and Sylvie have the best food in town, might as well enjoy it," he responds with a smile.

"You're too sweet Gar," Sylvie says, exiting the kitchen holding Steve's grilled cheese. She's accompanied by a man, whom you assume is Fred, holding the rest of the table's plates. He hastily places the food in front of you, Robin, and Cat before turning toward Gary the Mechanic.

"To what do we owe the pleasure Gar?" Freddy asks, playfully punching the large man's arm.

"Just finished up changing a tire for Steve here," Gary says, shaking Steve as he claps his shoulder. You giggle as a strand of hair falls into Steve's face. He looks at you with wide eyes before Sylvia puts his grilled cheese in front of him.

"You get Chuck his cassettes back yet?" Fred asks, "He won't stop bringing it up"

"Wow, everybody knows about that, huh? You keep 'em an extra weekend and it's like the world stops spinning!" Gary chuckles, glancing at Steve.

"It's so cool that you're all so close, Steve was just telling us that he got to hear about you guys!" Cat says.

"Cat, c'mon," Steve mutters.

"What?" Cat asks.

"Don't worry about that kid," Gary chortles, shaking Steve once again with the weight of his hand, "I enjoy talking about my friends, I don't mind my stories getting shared"

"That's for sure," Sylvie says emphatically, wiping her hands on the towel she used to hold the food.

"If you'd like to tell it again, we'd love to hear it," Cat says, shoveling a forkful of scrambled egg into her mouth. You nod in agreement and

so does Robin. Steve tries to hide the fact that he's not too excited to hear it again, but nods anyway.

"You don't have to tell him twice," Fred chuckles, "I best head back, still got people to feed! Y'all enjoy your meal"

You all thank him as he slips back through the double doors.

"I'll give you the short version," Gary starts, "I've known old Freddy since we were kids, we grew up right next door to each other just a town over. When we got to high school, Fred and Sylvie met in cooking class and wound up going steady-" You nudge Steve at the words "going steady", earning a playful scoff from him. "-All three of us stayed close throughout school and that's when Chucky-boy moved to town. Junior year I think it was. He was a loner type so Sylvie took him under her wing and introduced him to us. The rest is history"

Gary pulls his wallet out of his pants pocket and holds out an old photo with the year "1946" scribbled into the corner. You, Robin, and Cat all lean in eagerly to look closer at it. They must've been in high school at the time of the photo. You smile at the way Fred is planting a kiss on Sylvie's temple while she and Chuck are pressed into Gary's sides. You notice Chuck's poor attempt at hiding a smile, and let out a giggle.

"Gary here took an even bigger liking to him," Sylvie adds, "He and Chuck were practically inseparable from the get-go"

"Yeah, you can certainly say that," Gary says with a blush creeping over his smiling face.

"Oh, are you and Chuck together?" Robin asks, rather boldly.

Gary sighs, "That would be a no, I've never bothered him with my feelings- well those feelings at least. He's got enough to worry about"

You let out a sad "oh" as you realize what he is saying.

"Well, why not?" Steve asks.

"Life got too busy. And when you've put it off as long as I have, the anxiety builds. It would be way too hard to let him know now. My

old heart couldn't take the rejection," Gary says, giving Steve a sad smile.

"I'm sorry," Cat says sadly.

"Ohh that's alright. But let that be a cautionary tale to you youngsters, don't put off till tomorrow what you can do today! You don't want to end up a sad old coot like me because you got scared," Gary says before looking directly at Robin and Cat, "I'm glad you two are ahead of the curve, keep it up!"

You're a bit shocked that Gary and Sylvie were able to see through Cat and Robin so easily, but there really is just a sort of sixth sense. Heck, you knew Robin wasn't interested in men from the moment you met her and you've known that about Cat for even longer.

You see Cat give Robin a sweet smile. Steve is slowly taking bites of his sandwich, and he seems a bit zoned out.

"Well, I'll let y'all keep eating, I'll see ya when you get your car," Gary says, "I'll be seeing you, Sylvie. See ya, Freddy!"

"Bye, now Gar," Sylvia calls after him before turning her attention to you and Steve, "That's a good piece of advice he just gave you, ya know."

Steve breaks from his trance and you almost spill the water in your hand.

"Oh no, I- we- uh what?" Steve stumbles over his words. You can hear your friends snicker at you two as they pick at their food.

"Oh, didn't mean to strike a nerve there, hon," Sylvie laughs, "I just meant that maybe one day you might want to find something like what your friends have, is all. Y'all enjoy your meals, holler if ya need anything."

You both visibly relax as you realize she wasn't necessarily talking about you two *together*. Robin and Cat thank her as she walks away before bursting out into laughter once again. You and Steve shoot them a look.

"*That's so sad*," you hastily change the topic, "The thing with Gary and Chuck, I mean"

"Yeah, it *is*," Cat says, taking the bait, "It's never too late for love. I should've told him that..."

She continues the conversation, turning toward Robin, and you laugh internally at how much her hopeless romantic side is showing. You chance a glance at Steve, who is staring down silently at his food. You sigh as Gary's words play over and over in your head.

The idea of just grabbing Steve and kissing him right here crosses your mind, but you wave away the notion. You saw how he reacted to Sylvie's suggestion. Your heart sinks a bit at the thought of it. You consider Steve a pretty good friend now, you don't want to throw out all that work and make things weird between you.

You decide that keeping it to yourself, for now, can't hurt. Maybe even forever if it means getting to keep Steve around. You decide to put on a brave face and finish the meal with your friends without all the angsty thoughts. There's plenty of time for contemplation in the car.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Yay, a little bit of fluff at the beginning there :) I don't have as much written for the next chapter as I usually do, so it may a second before I finish it. I'll get it out ASAP though, and it's the final chapter so it'll be pretty long hehe. Thank you again!

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my tumblr: lame0-is-trying

## 4. You Do?

### Notes for the Chapter:

Hi! Final chapter!! I want to give a quick trigger warning for emetophobia and creepy men. I've placed a "\*\*\*" at the beginning and end of the mention of throw-up, as well as the interactions with the creepy guys. Please skip those sections if need be :) Enjoy!!

Steve is refusing to let you help pay for the car. The entire walk to Gary's shop was spent bickering, albeit playfully—but now you're getting frustrated. It's to the point where you are trying to shoulder-check each other out of the way to talk to Gary at his desk.

"Take my card first," you say with an outstretched hand.

"No, Gary. It's my car, don't let-Hey! Quit it!" Steve says resisting as you try to pull his arm down.

Robin and Cat both let out a quiet groan of annoyance from the waiting area chairs. They have now been lazing there for about 20 minutes, waiting for the car stuff to be over with.

Gary stands patiently with a small, polite smile glued to his face. His hand is awkwardly hanging in midair, unsure of what to do.

Steve finally shakes you off and slaps the card into the mechanic's hand.

"Fine, whatever, Steve," you relent, your irritation getting the best of you.

Steve was so proud of winning, he hadn't noticed that you were actually kind of upset. You flop down in the seat across from Robin and Cat and cross your arms.

"Hey, you okay?" Robin asks, sincerity evident in her voice.

"Yeah, I'm all good," you say, trying your best to sound cool and

collected. It's very clear that Robin doesn't believe you.

"Don't worry, we'll get everyone's snacks for the road," she comforts you regardless.

"Yeah," you laugh half-heartedly.

Robin doesn't push any further, and you're grateful. Cat looks like she wants to offer some support as well, but refrains. You're happy that they can read you so well. Anymore talking and you'll probably start bawling out of frustration- although, you don't even really know what you're so upset about.

Steve finishes things up and finally gets his car back. You all pile in and Gary waves you off, wishing you luck on your trip. You can hear Steve chatting with Robin and Cat as he drives back to the motel, but you aren't paying attention. You stare silently out the passenger seat window, avoiding eye contact with him at all costs. You can feel him glancing over at you every now and then, and you wonder why on earth he can't just let you sit in your angst.

Steve pulls the car into the parking lot, and you immediately unbuckle your seatbelt to get out. You're trying your best to not seem so upset, but you can't look at Steve anymore without a pit forming in your stomach. Just the sight of his face is making you upset at this point. Not angry, just *sad*.

It kind of hurts that Steve doesn't want your help. Maybe Gary and Sylvie's words had more of an impact on you than you'd like to admit. Maybe the idea of Steve rejecting you or not being enough for him hurts. A lot. Steve refusing your help at the mechanic was just the thing that set you off, there's a lot of emotions you're trying to sort through. You just hope you can get it together so you aren't such a bummer for the rest of the trip.

You lead the way up the stairs and fumble around your jacket pocket for the room key. Robin and Cat get into their room, confirming that they'll meet you near the stairs again to check out. You unlock the door right as Steve makes it up the last step, so you hold it open for him. He grabs the door with a quiet "thanks" and you start making your way towards the bathroom.

"Hey, wait," Steve says, gently grabbing your shoulder. You turn around to face him and he pauses, looking for the right words, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to make you upset..."

"No, you're fine, Steve. I'm just- I don't know, I think it's travel anxiety or something," you lie, looking at the ground.

"Well, I'm sorry if I made it worse," Steve says sincerely, brushing his fingers over your upper arm. His touch sends shivers up your spine, and you immediately scold yourself for letting it get to you.

"You don't have to apologize," you say.

Steve goes to say something else, but shuts his mouth and pulls you into a hug instead. Without a second thought, you wrap your arms around him. The hug is quick, but it's sincere and warm and something about it puts you at ease. You get a whiff of his cologne, the same one you smelt last night. You give him a smile as you pull apart, which he reciprocates.

"Thanks, Steve," you say quietly.

"Of course," he responds.

If nothing else, you're glad to have him as a friend. You already knew this, but he has grown so much since his high school days. You can't help but admire it. You never thought you would wind up considering Steve a close friend, but you're glad he's in your life- regardless of if he feels the same way you do.

You both finish grabbing your things and meet Robin and Cat to check out. Steve unlocks the car and you all place your bags back in the spots they were in last night before walking to the lobby. Bracing yourself for the strong smoke smell, you make your way inside. Chuck is there at his desk, newspaper in hand just like yesterday, but this time he has his walkman out on the desk.

"Looks like Gary got your cassettes back to you," Robin observes.

"Mhmm," Chuck mumbles, not looking up from the paper.

"Seems like a cool guy," Cat mentions, doing a terrible job at hiding



her hinting, "It's cool that you let him borrow your music... sharing is...cool"

"Mhmm," Chuck repeats.

"Those kinds of friends are rare, gotta keep them close-" Robin puts a hand on Cat's shoulder, signaling her to stop.

"He ain't going nowhere, and I ain't going nowhere. How can I help yall?" Chuck says, eyes still glued to the paper.

You all hand your keys back and Chuck sends you off with a flick of his newspaper. Once outside, you grab the handle of Steve's passenger door and look back through the lobby window. You see Chuck pick up one of his cassettes and put on his headset. You could've sworn that you saw a flicker of that smile you saw in Gary's photo.

Gary's advice floats its way back into your mind as you glance down at Steve in the driver's seat. You shake it from your mind and duck into the car.

One gas stop later (and the purchase of snacks supplied by you and Robin), and you're back on the road to New York.

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The rest of the drive went off without a hitch. You arrived at the hotel just as it was getting dark, and you all crashed pretty quickly. Steve took the pull-out couch (which he assured you is super comfortable when you protested) while Robin and Cat took one bed, leaving you with the other.

You all woke up early on New Year's eve to get a jump start on all the activities you had planned. Cat dug out her camera and spent the whole day snapping pictures, including a particularly cheesy one of you and Steve "holding" the statue of liberty- you're pretty excited to get that one developed. You did as much touristy sightseeing as possible before getting a late dinner. From there, you guys decided to head back to the hotel room for some pregaming.

Steve brings out a bottle of vodka from his bag, courtesy of his

parent's liquor cabinet. You each brought your own shot glasses from home and Robin bought lemonades for chasers from the hotel vending machine. Maybe not the best-tasting way to drink, but it's quick and easy.

This isn't your first time drinking with the group, but this has to be the most fun. You're all sat in a circle chatting and pouring shots. You're in an unspoken competition with Steve to see who can one-up the other, while Cat and Robin have their fair share as well. The radio is playing... Cat is still taking pictures... Everyone is getting a little giggly... You've almost drunk the entire bottle- wait are you seeing that right? You have to do double-take to make sure. You hold it up to your friends with wide eyes.

"Oh my gosh, how did we do that so fast?" Cat asked.

"Yeah seriously, I'm barely feeling buzzed," Robin chimed in.

"I hope we'll still be fine to go out. When do you think it's gonna hit us?" You ask.

"Eh, we'll be fine," Steve shrugs.

You furrow your eyebrows and shake the practically empty bottle in his face.

"I've drunk more and still gone out," Steve says, pushing your hand and the bottle away.

"And saved the world hopped up on whatever drug those Russians gave us," Robin added.

"Yeah exactly, we'll be fine," Steve shrugs again.

"Well, when should we head down then?" you ask.

"Honestly, we should probably go now," Cat mentions, "We probably won't be getting a good spot otherwise"

"Alright, let's head out," Robin says, moving to stand up.

Everyone follows suit, and that's when you finally start to feel the

alcohol. You take a step toward the bed to grab your coat, and it feels like the room goes wonky.

“Oh yeah, definitely feeling it now,” you think out loud.

”Mhmm,” Cat nods, balancing herself with the end of the bed.

“We’re fine, we’re fine,” Steve says once again as if he’s now trying to convince himself, “We didn’t come all this way just to not go to Times Square”

”Yeah, if anything this’ll make the ball drop more interesting, right?” Robin offers up, “...Right?”

You all get your shoes, hats, coats, and gloves on before heading to the elevators. You get the giggles watching Steve press the “down” button for some reason. You don’t even know why- all he did was press it with his knuckle instead of his fingertip, but it has you laughing to no end. Cat and Robin join you in your snickering as Steve stares at you in amused confusion.

With a ding, the elevator arrives and you all step in. Luckily no one else was on it, because you’re all talking pretty loud at this point. The elevator begins to move, and you all lose your balance for a moment. You and Steve grab each other's forearms for support as you’re all sent into another giggle fit. Cat snaps a few pictures before the elevator opens on the first floor.

You make it out onto the street (after faking sobriety past the tired-looking woman at the front desk) and look to each other for your next move.

“I guess we’ll just follow the noise?” Robin suggests, stifling more laughter.

”Yeah, we aren’t far, shouldn’t be too hard,” Cat says, motioning floppily up the street.

You see another group of people, who also seem a bit inebriated, and decide to follow them. Your steps are getting a bit unpredictable now, and it’s becoming a lot easier to lose your balance. Steve seems to be having the same problem, and you’re both constantly having to

catch each other. You look over at Cat who continues to snap photos. You wonder how well they are going to turn out, she seems to be taking them pretty erratically. You smile as she turns around and takes one of you.

**\*\***The closer you get to Times Square, the more and more people line the street. Including two men with greasy blonde hair on a doorstep, who seem to be bugging everyone that walks past them. And it looks like your group will be right in their line of fire.

Robin and Cat link arms and drift as far toward the street as they can (they also try to appear as sober as possible). You make sure to stick close to Steve, and practically glue yourself to his side. You replace your drunken smile with an attempt at an intimidating deadpan. As you approach the men you instinctually move to Steve's other side, closer to Robin and Cat. Steve reaches down and grabs your hand before placing himself between the men and you three.

"Heyyyyy buddy, lucky bastard aren't ya?" one of them calls.

"Yeah how bout we help you out? Three all to yourself isn't too fair," the other says, standing up from his spot on the steps.

Robin scoffs and Cat rolls her eyes. You feel your face heat up with anger at the sound of the men's ugly guffawing. You tighten your grip on Steve's hand and he squeezes back, reassuringly. You all keep charging ahead.

Just as you think that you're in the clear, the men decide to follow you. The slightly taller one begins to stride next to Steve and the shorter one begins bugging Robin.

"No need to be rude, pretty lady," the shorter one coos.

"Go to hell," Cat snaps, pulling Robin closer to her.

"Was I talking to you?" the shorter one says, eyes narrowing at Cat.

"*Buzz off* assface," Robin says, looking down at him menacingly.

The man scoffs and spins around Cat and Robin. He's now standing uncomfortably close to you.

"This one's pretty cute, huh?" the short one asks his friend- brother? Either way, he looks you up and down so you give him a side-eye.

"Sure is. You up for sharing pretty boy? Promise we won't leave you out," the taller brother asks Steve.

"You heard them. Get lost," Steve says.

"Or what?" the taller one asks.

The short one starts invading your space once again.

"*Don't touch me, freak,*" you spit, elbowing him in the chest.

Steve stops in his tracks. He grabs the tall one's collar and shoves him away, never letting go of your hand. Robin and Cat stop as well, ready to step in if need be.

"I said *get lost* shit-for-brains," Steve says.

The two brothers dust themselves off and walk back to their original spot, scowling.

"You guys okay?" Robin asks, rubbing Cat's arm.

"Yeah," you shudder, leaning against Steve, "You guys alright?"

"Yeah... those creepy pieces of shit," Cat scoffs, fiddling with the strap of her camera.\*\*

You all mumble in agreement as you keep moving towards the roar of Times Square. You're still holding Steve's hand, and you smile at the fact that he hasn't let go either.

Eventually, those weirdos fade into drunken irrelevance and you four are back to excited chatter and laughter. You get closer to the main event and realize just how many people there are. It doesn't look like you're going to be able to get much closer, and even if you did you'd be packed into a gated corral with tons of other people.

"Guess we should've left way earlier," Robin observes.

"Yeah, these people must have been here all day," you mumble, the noises around you sounding a bit garbled.

"We can still *kinda* see the ball," Cat says, squinting.

She's right, you *can* kind of see the ball. And you're just close enough to the action to hear a band playing- or a musician singing? You're not sober enough to know, but the song sounds like it's pretty good. You sit there with your eyebrows furrowed, racking your brain to try and figure out what song this is. You're about to turn to everyone and ask what they think when a POP interrupts your thoughts.

"Woahhh... Look!" Steve says squeezing your hand. He's pointing at the sky with a look of awe.

You crane your neck to see the remnants of a firework in the distance. And then you see another one shoot up. And another one. And more and more. They just keep going, it looks like they're coming from a few blocks over.

You look up at Steve to see him smiling at you. It's hard to keep him in focus, but you blush at his cute face anyway. You look back up at the sky, still using each other's hand for balance, and see one of those super sparkly ones that make a crackling noise.

"Hey, I love those kinds-" The next thing you know, you're on the ground. You know you had to let go of Steve's hand to catch yourself, and your knee is cold against the concrete, you must have torn a hole in your jeans. Your face is inches from the ground and you're trying to figure out what happened, but you don't even remember falling. \*\*When you look up, you see Steve standing between you and those stupid brothers from before. Robin and Cat are trying to help you stand up.

You can hear some sarcastic variation of "sorry man, didn't see you guys" coming from the short one's mouth. Steve is arguing with them, but you can't focus enough on what they're saying. He sways a bit as the shorter brother steps toward him. Steve shoves him away and that's when the taller brother steps in. He grabs Steve by the shoulders and throws him into the nearby street light. Steve's face smacks against it and he crumples to the floor.

You gasp and scramble to your feet. You, Robin, and Cat all kneel next to him as a few good samaritans hold the brothers back.

"Can you hear me, Steve?" Robin slurs out. The brothers end up dipping out, realizing they might have escalated the situation too much.

Steve lets out a groan as he lifts his head, "Yeah... why are you yelling?"

Blood is pouring from his nose, and he has a pretty gnarly gash on the bridge of it from the impact.

"I brought a first aid kit," Cat says, "It's in the room"

"Let's go back then," you murmur, forcing yourself to focus on Steve.

You help Steve stand up and let him lean on you. Robin holds an arm out for support, and the four of you begin to shuffle back to the hotel. Those creeps just had to ruin the night, didn't they?

Passerby's stare your group down as you make your way back, with good reason. The blood from Steve's face is dripping onto his jacket and he looks pretty scary. Your heart wrenches as he lets out another groan.

"We're almost there," you reassure him.

"Hey, you okay?" Steve mumbles, looking at you.

"Mhmm," you respond, a bit confused as to why he's worried about *you* right now. There are certainly bigger matters at hand, "I'm totally fine"

That's not entirely true. It feels like you're slowing down a lot. It's like you're getting drunker and drunker with each step and it seems like Robin and Cat are feeling the same way. All three of you are struggling to keep walking in any semblance of a straight line.

You guys finally stumble through the front door of the hotel and, luckily, the woman working from before is nowhere to be seen. You didn't expect to be back here so soon, you were actually pretty

excited to see the ball drop.

You all load back into the elevator, and you're feeling wonkier than you have all night. You grip onto the handrail behind you and wrap your arm tighter around Steve to keep him (and yourself) upright. Steve lays his head on yours and lets out another quiet groan. In any other situation, you'd be worried about his blood getting onto your hat or hair or something. You're more concerned with not taking a tumble right now though.

You get out of the elevator as quickly as possible and start making your way toward the room. You look back to check on Cat and Robin. Robin's shoulder and face are pressed into the wall as Cat is trying to get her to keep walking.

"You guys'okay?" you call out.

"Mhmm, yeah, yeah," Cat replies, finally peeling Robin off of the wallpaper.

You miss the lock a few times but eventually get the door open. You head straight to the bathroom and help Steve get his jacket off and sit down on the floor. You grab his face and gently look it over. His nose doesn't look broken, but some ice couldn't hurt. You grab some tissues and clean up his face a bit before handing him one to hold to his nose.

"Hey Cat?" you call out.

"Yeah?" she responds, fumbling with the zipper on her suitcase.

"You okay to sit with Steve while I get ice?"

"Uhh yeah," she replies, keeping an eye on Robin, who is wandering the room aimlessly.

"Wait, no," Steve mumbles, reaching out to grab your sleeve, "Don't go"

"I'll be right back, I promise," you say, giving him a small smile.

Steve nods and closes his eyes. You stand up as Cat stumbles in with



the first aid kit, Robin trailing behind her. You take off your coat and grab the ice bucket before heading down the hall to the machine. It feels like the hallway goes on forever, and it's especially trippy when you pass rooms that are blasting different kinds of music. You shovel ice into the bucket and hurry to the room, the trip back is just as weird as the trip there.

You burst into the room and take the bag out of the bucket. Robin is facedown on her bed and Cat is running out of the bathroom. You look at her quizzically.

"I can't, I- ugh," she says, blocking her view of the bathroom with her hand, "Tried to help, but I can't"

\*\*That's when you heard gagging from inside the bathroom.

"Oh no," you say, walking into the bathroom and spotting Steve hunched over the toilet. You look at the ceiling and shuffle over to him before slowly crouching down beside him.

"Hey, you're back," Steve says breathily as if he's relieved to see you.

"Told ya," you laugh.

You're still a bit woozy, but you comfort him nonetheless. You place the bag of ice in the sink and put a hand on his back. You pull the sweaty strands of hair from his face right as he hurls.\*\*

"Oh god, you okay?" you ask, rubbing circles on his back and keeping your line of sight as far from him as possible

"Yeah, yeah," he responds, sitting up straight and scooting away from the toilet, "I feel better..."

"C'mon, I'll get you fixed up," you say, closing the toilet lid and flushing it. Steve groans as you both almost fall trying to get him up onto the closed toilet.

"I'm gonna brush your teeth first," you say, forcing yourself to act sober for the time being, "Your breath is horrible"

Steve sighs as he slumps over onto his legs. You step away, sweeping

aside everyone's toiletries in search of his toothbrush.

"This is it right?" you ask, surveying the toothbrush carefully as it fades in and out of focus.

"Mhmm," Steve responds looking up momentarily.

You use whatever toothpaste is closest and step back over to Steve who slowly sits back up.

"Open your mouth," you instruct, putting all of your focus into the task.

Steve follows instructions and you start brushing. You let go of his jaw for a second, and the side of his head slumps onto your stomach. You let out a giggle.

"Steve, keep your mouth open," you instruct once again, gently tapping his cheek.

He laughs and follows instructions, but leaves his head on your stomach. You grab his chin with your free hand to hold him steady while you move the toothbrush. When you deem his teeth sufficiently clean, you help him over to the sink to spit.

He slumps over the sink and lets the toothpaste drip out of his mouth.

"Steve," you laugh, "Actually spit"

Steve giggles in response and turns on the sink to rinse his mouth.

"Oh god, m'bleeding so much," Steve says, his laughter ceasing. He stares at the blood from his nose dripping into the sink.

"I think that's just dried blood you're rising off with the water," you say, helping him stand back up, "C'mere I'll clean it up"

Instead of going back to the toilet, Steve slumps into you and wraps his arms around your waist. You smile as you hold his upper back. His chin is on your shoulder and he's leaning against the sink. A shiver runs down your spine as he sighs and gives you a squeeze.

Despite how much you want to stay like this, you start shuffling him back toward the toilet and gently sit him down. He lets his hands slip off of you and looks up at you with tired eyes.

“I fell in front of so many people,” he says screwing his eyes shut.

“Yeah,” you laugh, “It’s okay, I did too”

He reaches up to touch the split on his nose and you gently pull his hand away.

“I’m always bleeding,” he laments.

“I know, I’m sorry,” you say, grabbing an alcohol swab from Cat’s first aid kit.

“No, I’d do it again if it means making sure you’re okay,” Steve slurs.

You feel heat rush across your face as you smile down at him.

“Look up,” you say, hastily changing the subject, “Gotta warn you, this is gonna sting”

He winces as you place the alcohol swab onto the cut on his nose. You replace the swab with a tissue to keep the blood from dripping again. You realize that there are no bandaids left in the first aid kit, they must’ve fallen out into Cat’s suitcase. You sigh and turn your head towards the door.

“Cat!” you call out. No response. “Robin!” you sigh at the silence.

“Can you hold this Steve?” you ask, bringing his hand up to the tissue. He nods.

You stumble to the end of the bathroom and look out into the bedroom. Robin and Cat are in the middle of a lazy make-out session on the floor next to their bed. You pull your head back into the bedroom and look back at Steve, who has returned to slumping over his legs. You quickly walk across the room and grab a handful of bandaids from Cat’s open bag before shuffling back over to Steve. You squat down next to him and gently brush his hair out of his face.

“Okay, got bandaids,” you say, more to refocus yourself than keep Steve updated. You begin positioning your arm awkwardly, trying to find a way to get the bandaid on the bridge of his nose without making him sit back up.

You clumsily get it onto the cut and pat his hair to let him know you’re done. You take the ice you placed in the sink, wrap one of the hotel face towels around it, and gently place it onto his nose

“Thank you,” Steve slurs out.

“Course”

“I should’ve beat the shit out of that guy when I had the chance. Like the Russian”

“The Russian?”

“Yeah in the bunker”

“Oh yeah,” you laugh, running your fingers comfortingly through his hair.

“Hey, is your knee okay?” he asks.

You look down at your leg, there’s some dried blood on the rip in your jeans. And it looks like there’s a decent-sized scrape. You’re wondering how drunk you must be to not even notice the pain.

“Oh yeah, don’t even feel it,” you say.

Without a word, Steve sits up, ditching the ice on his nose in favor of grabbing an alcohol swab. He clumsily tears it open and brings it to your knee.

“I can do that, Steve,” you say, reaching for his hand.

“No,” Steve says, swatting your hand away.

“Jeez, alright,” you laugh.

You brace yourself for the sting as Steve cleans up the scratch. He

then feels around the counter for one of the extra bandaids you grabbed. He gets it peeled and sits down on the floor with you. He tries to put it on your knee but misses and you both giggle as he tries again. You grab his hands and attempt to guide the bandaid onto the scratch together. After a few tries, it's on there to stay. Steve's hand is lingering just below the bandage as you bring the ice back up to his nose.

"Those guys were dicks," Steve says, placing an arm on the toilet lid and resting his head on it with closed eyes.

"Yeah," you agree, "...Thanks for standin' up for me back there"

"Course," he says, absentmindedly rubbing your leg, "M'always here if you need me"

You feel your heart become a puddle in your chest. Such simple words and he has you blushing like a fool, "I'm always here for you too"

A smile creeps across his face. Something about seeing him grin like that forces you to follow suit. His smile begins to fade as he lets out a quiet sigh.

"I think I need to lie down," Steve mumbles.

You help him stand up and you both stagger past Robin and Cat (who are still making out in the space between the bed and the wall). You decided he would be more comfortable on your bed rather than the pull-out couch, so you help him lay down there. Once he gets his shoes off, Steve immediately closes his eyes and pulls the covers up to his face.

You stand there for a moment before deciding it would be weird to go about your business with your friends kissing just a few feet away. You carefully walk over to the balcony and open the sliding door. You step outside and sit down on the concrete, leaning against the glass.

The distant hum of the people at Times Square, egged on by a muffled voice on a microphone is barely audible. If you focus hard

enough, you think you'll be able to see part of the ball drop from here. You look at your watch. Five minutes to the new year.

You let out an involuntary shiver as a gust of wind whips in your face. You stare off into the cityscape, getting a bit nervous as it starts to feel like you're spinning. You place your hands on the floor to try and ground yourself. The people celebrating in the rooms next to you seem to be having a good time because you can feel the bass of whatever music they're playing through the floor. Suddenly, you hear a soft thud on the glass behind your head. You whip your head around and see Steve poking his head out the door.

"What's wrong?" you ask him, steadying yourself with a hand to your chest.

"You didn't lay with me," he says, clearly disappointed.

You don't know what to say for a moment. You didn't know you were *supposed* to lay with him, your plan was to take the pull-out.

"Wanted to see the new year," you say, gesturing toward the faint roar of a crowd.

Steve stands still for a moment before silently sitting down on the ground and scooting to your side.

"I thought you wanted to lay down," you say, secretly relieved to have someone to sit with you.

"Well, I don't want you to sit out here by yourself," Steve says, leaning his head back on the glass, "How much longer 'till midnight?"

"'Bout 4 minutes," you reply.

It starts to feel like you're spinning again, so you lean onto Steve's shoulder to see if that would help. He's tense for a moment, so you look up at him to ask if it's alright. Before you can get the question out, he places his head on top of yours. You both relax into each other and slump further onto the glass door. Three minutes to midnight.

You start to hear your neighbors make their way onto their own balconies, chattering excitedly and hoping to get a glimpse of the ball drop as well. You're so focused on the noise around you that you almost didn't hear Steve say your name. You snap out of it and hum in reply.

"Why was I in your bed?" he asks.

"Because it's comfier, and you're hurt and drunk," you murmur, struggling to stay awake.

"*You're* hurt and drunk," Steve says defensively.

"Nice comeback, Stevie"

"Just don't don't sleep on the pullout"

"Why not? You said it was comfy"

"It's your bed, you sleep in it"

"Only if you're okay sharing with me again"

"Ha, like that's such a bad thing"

Two minutes to midnight. You look up at Steve.

"What do you mean?" you ask, stomach full of butterflies.

Steve sits there for a moment, staring off over the balcony. He opens and closes his mouth once or twice before responding.

"I liked being able to hold you, and I liked it when you held me," Steve finally says, "I wouldn't mind getting to do that again"

You smile at him, trying to decide whether or not he's teasing you.

"Can I kiss you at midnight?" he asks suddenly, making you jump.

The smile falls from your face as you make your decision, "You're drunk Steve, you don't mean any of this"

"Yes I do," Steve says sincerely, rubbing your arm.

“Yeah, well, *I* don’t wanna ‘nother kiss that you won’t remember,” you blurt.

“Huh?” Steve questions.

You sigh, “You kissed my forehead while you were asleep. At the motel”

“... I did that in real life?”

“Yeah, you were prob’ly having a dream about Nancy Wheeler or something right?”

“No,” Steve says, rubbing his temple, “I- I knew it was you. I thought I imagined it...”

“...What do you mean you knew it was me?” you ask.

Steve pauses for a moment and turns to look right into your eyes, “... I like you. A lot,” he murmurs.

“...You do?” you say, barely above a whisper.

“I have for a while. I jus’ figured you weren’t into relationships and stuff-”

“But I told you in the car-”

“Yeah, I know that *now*, but before you said you were into romantic stuff... I jus’ thought I had no chance”

“I thought *I* had no chance with *you*,”

"Why would you think that?"

"Guess I thought you wouldn't be happy with me since I don't wanna have sex..."

“I mean, it would take some gettin’ used to I guess, but...” Steve shuts his eyes, trying to shake off some of the drunkenness so he can focus on finding the right words, “You’re- like- the coolest person I know. After everything with the Russians, I didn’t think I would want



to be with someone again- everything would just be too much to explain, and- I don't know, you listened. And you made it easy to talk to you. And you didn't treat me any different, and I can be normal with you, and you always make me laugh, and you're *fucking* gorgeous... and I don't want to pull a Gary on you. So... here I am spewing my feelings."

One minute to midnight.

You sit there smiling at him. He's picking at the seam of his pants, avoiding eye contact with you. You gently grab his cheek and turn his head to face you. You both glance at each other's lips before bringing your eyes back to one another.

"I know what ya mean, I've been thinking about what Gary and Sylvie said nonstop," you sigh.

Steve touches the hand you have on his face and leans into it. You stare into each other's eyes for a moment longer as you both start to inch toward each other...

"But I thought I was more of the Gary in this situation," you laugh, pulling away from him slightly.

"I don't care who's who," Steve joins you in laughing, "I just don't wanna sit around all miserable because I didn't tell you"

You sigh looking at the tan bandaid on his nose, wishing you could make it go away for him. You feel a wave of emotion surging through you. Guilt. Adoration. Relief. Excitement. You practically throw yourself into Steve's chest in an attempt to convey some of them to him. He lets out a small "oof" and wraps an arm around you. His free hand gently finds its way to the back of your head and holds you close to him.

"So, do you wanna try being together then?" you ask, placing your chin on his chest so you can look up at him.

"Course I do," Steve sighs, "But I think you mean *goin' steady*"

"Shut up," you roll your eyes.

The crowd at Times Square suddenly roars, and you both turn your attention to it. Your neighbors on the balconies beside you start shouting, “10! 9! 8!...”.

You look back at Steve, who appears to be asking you a question with his eyes. You just nod happily.

“...6! 5! 4!...”

You can smell the combination of the cologne and hint of the vodka lingering on him as you sit up and pull him to you. He tentatively rests a hand on your waist as you brush a strand of his hair out of his face. Your lips connect as a loud ‘Happy New Year!’ roars through the city.

You’re a bit hesitant at first, worrying about his nose, but he cups your cheek and pulls you closer. You both smile into the kiss as your arms make their way to wrap around his neck. Once you get a bit more confident, the buzz of excited chatter around you feels like it fades into the distance. Steve’s lips are soft and warm, enveloping yours with a feeling of comfort and happiness you never thought a kiss could provide. You move in time with one another, albeit a bit sloppily with the alcohol influencing you, as the kiss deepens with every turn of your heads.

You both reluctantly separate from one another, panting softly as you attempt to catch your breath. Steve places a chaste kiss on your nose before placing his forehead on yours. The contentment you feel is immeasurable. The way Steve holds you has you feeling like the most important person on the planet. You pepper his lips with a few pecks before leaning into his chest once again. Steve rubs your back lightly as he lays a cheek on top of your head. You both sigh, enjoying the music and cheers sounding from Times Square before you sit back up. Steve must have started falling asleep because his eyes flutter open at your sudden movement.

“Alright, m’ready to get some sleep now,” you say, tucking that wily strand of hair behind his ear once again.

“Mkay,” Steve says tilting his head as he smiles at you.

You help each other stand up and carefully make your way back inside. Cat and Robin are passed out on the floor, their arms still tangled between the two of them, but you're too tired to really pay them any mind.

Before you know it, you're laying in your bed, sleep barreling its way toward you. Your hand is running through Steve's hair as his head rests on your chest. You feel him hum contentedly and you let a smile creep across your face.

"Goodnight Steve," you say quietly.

"Goodnight y/n"

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"Hey!" you call out the window of Steve's car.

Cat runs down her driveway, waving a small stack of photos at you with a big grin.

*Finally*, you think to yourself. Cat had been stalling on getting the film from New York developed for like a month now. You were worried that she'd spent your half of the costs on something else by now.

Robin immediately unbuckles her seatbelt and gets out of the car.

"I thought we were all going to the movies?" Steve asks.

"Not us," Cat says handing you the photos through your window, "Did Robin not tell you? We changed our minds on the phone this morning"

You gleefully take the photos and look at Robin.

"Oh yeah, I did forget, sorry. We're gonna make cookies and watch something here," Robin says with a smile.

"Oh alright, have fun!" you send them off. Steve waves as well.

"Later!" Robin calls and she and Cat walk up the steps to the front door.

"Well, good for them," you laugh, straightening out the photos.

"You still wanna go, right?" Steve jokes, placing a hand on your leg.

"Mmm nah, I think I'm gonna walk home," you tease. You kiss his cheek before holding the photos in front of you both, "I've been *dying* to see these"

You flip through the prints, giggling at the blurry picture of you walking to Times Square. You finally reach the one from the statue of liberty, the one you've been dying to see for about a month now.

"Here it is," you say surveying it, "... Ugh I hate it"

"What do you mean? It's nice," Steve says, taking it from your hand.

"Our hands aren't even near her," you laugh, "And look at my face"

"Mmm... Yeah, you're right," Steve says, squinting at the photo, "You're too pretty, it totally ruins the picture"

You playfully smack his arm and put the photo at the back of the stack. You keep flipping through and eventually, you reach another one of you and Steve. It's from the fireworks- before those guys came and ruined the moment- and it's super sweet. Both your eyes are glued to the sky, and the lights of the city make for a super cool background. You both seem a bit loopy, but you like how you look regardless. Steve looks great too, but the best part is how cute you guys look holding hands.

"Ohhh," you sigh, leaning on his shoulder, "*This* is nice"

"Aww yeah," Steve says, placing his head on top of yours, "I call dibs on it"

"No way!" you pull the picture away from him.

"You have the statue of liberty one!"

"Very funny," you chuckle.

The next photo catches your eye. You hold it closer to your face and

your heart melts at the sight of it. It's basically the same picture, but Steve is looking at you instead of the sky. He seems so purely happy to be there.

"Awww, oh my *gosh*," you gush. You hold out the previous picture for him to take, "Yeah, you have that one, this one's my favorite"

Steve pulls down his sun visor and takes the photo you hand him. He slips it into the elastic band that holds his receipts and sits back to get a better look at it.

"How's that?" he asks.

"I love it," you say, leaning on the center console to admire it.

"Good, me too," Steve smiles.

You grin back before gently grabbing his cheek and pulling him into a kiss. He leans into you and then quickly pulls away. You look at him a bit confused, waiting for an explanation. He then starts attacking your face with small kisses, making you laugh.

"Can you guys kiss somewhere that's not in front of my house?" you hear Cat tease from her living room window.

The kisses cease and you turn around to face the house, smile still plastered on your face.

"Yeah, for sure! Next time we'll make out on the floor of a hotel room while *you* clean up a bloody nose," You stick your tongue out at her playfully and she gives you a cheeky smile

"You're gonna miss the previews if you don't start driving, dingus," Robin calls out, joining Cat at the window.

"Yeah, yeah, see you guys later," Steve shouts out the passenger window.

Your friends wave you off once again as Steve puts the car in drive. He's making his way towards the downtown theater when he grabs your hand and squeezes it. You admire his side profile as his head bobs to the music streaming out of the speakers. You couldn't be

happier than you are right now sitting with him. Just enjoying each other's company.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

I'm sorry it took so long to get this out, I was having some trouble with the pacing and then finals week hit lol. Thank you so much for the kudos on this! I've had a great time getting this idea out there, and I'm so grateful that you stuck with this piece to the end  
<3

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my tumblr: lame0\_is\_trying